

Digging for Dyar

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*the
man
behind
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myth*

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by
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and
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Harrison G. Dyar

STUDENTS OF ENTOMOLOGY usually learn of Harrison Gray Dyar, Jr. (1866–1929) in relation to Dyar's law of geometric growth. An important figure in early twentieth-century entomology, Dyar described numerous moths and mosquitoes and brought new, more precise standards to larval description, higher classification, and life histories (Forbes 1929, Heinrich 1929).

However, Dyar becomes a memorable figure in entomology when stories are told about a taxonomic name battle he waged with John Bernard Smith. Legend has it that the cantankerous Dyar dubbed a species *corpulentis* after his rather rotund colleague, while Smith, in retaliation, named another species *dyaria*. Dyar is described as a man who rarely smiled and had little to do with his colleagues at the United States National Museum (USNM). Stories also had it that the independently wealthy Dyar worked for the USNM for thirty-one years without a cent in compensation. As a writer and editor, he is remembered as highly critical and acerbic, noted for his fiery exchanges in print with his contemporaries. His reviews and publications were reputed to "tear up someone in print" (Mallis 1971).

Tales more lurid in nature are told of a secret second family, of mysterious tunnels connecting homes, and of children discovering at a high-school function that they shared a father with a passion for butterflies (Spilman 1984).¹ For the entomologist, this is the stuff of legends; for the historian, it is a challenge to separate fact from fiction. Truth often proves stranger than fiction, and this is certainly true in the case of Dyar. Thus, as we explore the labyrinth of Dyar's life, we will clarify what is true and false about Dyar's offbeat personal life and professional relations. We will document his passion for entomology and evaluate his contributions to science. In the process, some myths will be dispelled as others are verified. We may even create a few new ones or leave some shrouded in mystery.

Preparing for a Life Devoted to Science

Although little documentation is available about Dyar's early life, we do know that he was born in New York City 14 February 1866, the son of a well-to-do inventor (Essig 1931). His father, Harrison Gray Dyar, Sr. (1805–1875), married Eleonora Rosella Hannum (1842–1888) when he was sixty and she was twenty-three.

They had two children, Harrison Gray, Jr., and Nora Perle [Knopf] (1868–1931) (Dyar 1903c). The elder Dyar died when Harrison, Jr., was only nine, but he left his family in comfortable circumstances. Harrison, Sr., is said to have unsuccessfully disputed the priority of Samuel F. B. Morse as the inventor of the magnetic telegraph. He did, however, receive credit and remuneration for his inventions in the field of chemistry, especially dyes (Harrower 1875, Munroe 1902, Dyar 1903c, Howard 1929).

Dyar became interested in insects while still a youth. Accompanied at times by his sister Perle or his Uncle Joe, he searched for specimens in the woods near his family home in Rhinebeck, N.Y. In 1882, at sixteen, he began keeping detailed records on his larval rearing and field work in a "blue book." Entries note that on 29 July he "went out for butterflies with net made yesterday" and recorded his observations of a "babe chrysalis" after he "prepared a house for transformations." Among other things, the notebook contains the measurements of Lepidoptera used to develop Dyar's law. Dyar kept similar detailed journals of his research throughout his life, and they serve as field gazetteers to various collecting trips to the southern and western United States, Canada, the West Indies, and Panama.² Dyar recorded his early interest in the slug caterpillars (Limacodidae) in the blue book, and he regarded them as "the most remarkable of all Lepidopterous larvae" (Dyar 1894a, 212). He first published a description of a limacodid life history for *Limacodes inornata* (= *Isa textula*) in 1889 (Dyar 1889c).

Dyar graduated from the Roxbury Latin School in Boston in 1885 with advanced standing in mathematics, physics, and French. Ironically, the future taxonomist did not fare as well in Latin. He received his bachelor's degree in chemistry from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 1889, perhaps influenced by his father's career. Dyar had begun serious study of entomology while in college, and in 1888 he began to publish larval descriptions and life histories in such journals as *Entomologica Americana*, *Insect Life*, and *The Canadian Entomologist*. He soon was a regular contributor and, by his senior year, was in correspondence with the National Museum on entomological matters (Dyar 1888, 1889b).³

After graduating in 1889, Dyar married Zella Peabody of Los Angeles, a music



Harrison Gray Dyar's "blue book," begun in 1882, to record his observations on insects. Courtesy of the Department of Entomology, National Museum of Natural History.

teacher, with whom he shared a love of piano. The newlyweds lived for three years in New York City and at the family home in Rhinebeck on the Hudson River (Dyar 1924). He continued a lifelong practice of spending summers collecting and rearing insects. He traveled widely across the United States and Canada from the nearby Catskills and Adirondacks to British Columbia, Florida, and California's Sierra Nevada. Dyar began to build a personal collection through these trips and by rearing many poorly known species of Lepidoptera and sawflies (D. R. Smith 1987). He was now in regular contact with other New York entomologists, including Henry Edwards, George H. Hudson, and State Entomologist Joseph A. Lintner.⁴

Dyar's 1890 seminal work in *Psyche*, "The Number of Molts of Lepidopterous Larvae," demonstrated that head-capsule widths show a geometric progression in growth—the concept now known as Dyar's law or rule. This is a method to determine more accurately the number of instars for a species. Head width was chosen because it does not vary within each stage, as does body length. Using thirty-nine individuals of twenty-eight species, Dyar calculated the head-width ratios of successive instars, first over second, and so on. This ratio is often nearly constant, as one would expect from a geometric progression. Dyar calculated the expected width of each instar by multiplying the width of the final stage by this

ratio and worked his way back to the first. In this way, he could determine whether he had missed some instars or if there were exceptions to the geometric progression (Dyar 1890). The measurements, ratio, and calculations can often be seen in the top margins of his blue-book pages. In the autumn of 1892, Dyar returned to MIT to take the biology course and spent the summer at the Marine Biological Laboratory at Woods Hole, Mass., studying development with such leading figures as Thomas Hunt Morgan, Charles Otis Whitman, and Edmund B. Wilson. During this period, Dyar continued to rear larvae and visited the National Museum in 1893 to examine the collections. Returning to New York City in 1894, he received his master's degree from Columbia College (Howard 1929).⁵

All indications are that Dyar was well-versed in the entomological literature of the day. His thesis, "A Classification of Lepidopterous Larvae," tested the evolutionary approach to taxonomy advocated by John Henry Comstock of Cornell University in his 1893 essay, "Evolution and Taxonomy" (Comstock 1893). By this time, Dyar was no amateur interested only in collecting and naming specimens. Rather, he called for a scientific approach to taxonomy based on Darwin's theory of evolution and the study of larval characters. Larval data was obtained in the field, through detailed life-history studies (Dyar 1894a,b; Forbes 1929).

In his early work, Dyar focused on the Bombyces, a superfamily that included the noctuids, notodontids, saturniids, and limacodids, to name a few (Dyar 1889a, 1891). He came to regard Bombyces as a "miscellaneous aggregation of families," concurring with the German zoologist August Weismann that their larval characters demonstrated several independent lines of descent. At the same time, Dyar delineated several superfamilies that he believed reflected their branching evolutionary history (Dyar 1894a, 1896c), an arrangement more in line with the classification used today (Forbes 1929).

An active member of the New York entomological community, Dyar by 1894 was coauthoring articles with Berthold Neumoegen, a well-to-do New York banker with a large collection (Neumoegen & Dyar 1893–1894, 1894; Engelhardt 1929). At this time, Neumoegen wrote to Dyar that he wished to name a genus (not species) "*Dyaria*." Thus, *Dyaria* was not a species, nor was it named by John Bernard Smith, as

is widely believed. Neumoegen used his new genus *Dyaria* to place a new liparid (=Lymantriidae, now =Epipaschiinae) species *singularis* (Hodges 1983). Dyar does not appear to have objected—perhaps he, as well as Neumoegen, failed to notice the pun—and the description was published the following year, dedicated by Neumoegen to “my faithful co-labourer and friend” (Neumoegen 1893, 215). There is no evidence that Dyar ever named a species *smithi-formis* or *corpulentis* (Mallis 1971, Spilman 1984). Although the story of warring taxonomists misanthropically naming taxa for one another seems apocryphal, tales of personal animosity between Dyar and Smith are well grounded in fact (J. B. Smith 1909, Dyar 1910).⁶

Despite his youth, Dyar was not afraid to criticize his elders. His earliest known critique of a major work was a review of none other than J. B. Smith's 1891 checklist, in which he noted many omissions and incorrect synonymies (J. B. Smith 1891, Dyar 1892b). He also disparaged Smith's contributions as coauthor in a monograph on *Acronycta* (Noctuidae). Smith had lent his larval notes and specimens to Dyar for his section of the work. But Dyar wrote, “Professor Smith had practically no useful notes on early stages to turn over to me,” and his specimens “consisted of the common species on which I already had notes, and only a few of the specimens were of service” (Smith & Dyar 1898, 6).

His capacity for criticism did not always dissuade colleagues from publishing with him. An example of this is his collaboration with Emily L. Morton, who had worked previously with William Henry Edwards and Alpheus Spring Packard (Morton 1888, Packard 1890). Although Dyar had critiqued Morton's account of the life history of a slug caterpillar, *I. textula*, she assisted him with the first of his twenty papers on “The New York Slug Caterpillars” (Dyar 1892a, 1895–1899; Morton 1892). The series became a model for life history studies (Forbes 1929), culminating in a genealogy for these limacodids based on larval characters and a discussion of dispersal routes via land bridges. Although Dyar worked on many other families of Lepidoptera, the “codes” always remained his “pets.”⁷

After such early devotion to entomology, it is almost surprising to learn that Dyar completed his education in 1895 as the first Ph.D. student in bacteriology at Columbia College in New York City, under

T. Marshall Prudden. He did, however, minor in entomology. From 1895 to 1897, Dyar taught the introductory course in bacteriology at the Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons, an innovation in medical school curriculum (Gay 1939). His interest in bacteriology may have been fostered by his biology professor at MIT, William Thompson Sedgwick, an expert on public sanitation and bacteriology. Dyar may have been further influenced by S. Adolphus Knopf, an expert on tuberculosis, who was married to Dyar's sister, Perle. Dyar's dissertation, “On Certain Bacteria from the Air of New York City,” studied the dust-borne spread of tuberculosis (Dyar 1895b, Anonymous 1924). In other papers, Prudden and Dyar advanced the thesis that bacterial variation often was a reflection of life stages and environmental factors, and thus was not an indicator of separate species (Dyar 1895a, 1896b; Howard 1933). The notion of bacterial life stages was rejected by Dyar's colleagues at the time, enjoyed a brief vogue in the late 1920s, but then it was completely rejected (Gossel 1988).⁸

Because few professional positions were available, many nineteenth-century naturalists pursued medicine as a career and natural history as an avocation. Indeed, Dyar continued his active work in entomology, as demonstrated by his correspondence with Augustus Radcliffe Grote, George D. Hulst, A. S. Packard, Henry Skinner, J. B. Smith, and Joseph Lintner. These letters reveal Dyar's growth from apprentice to journeyman entomologist, as well as his correspondents' tendency to hector him a little as mentors.⁹ The microlepidopterist C. H. Fernald chided Dyar,

One of the first lessons you should learn before doing anything with small moths, is to put them in proper shape before you send them away for determination, for those who can aid you are very busy men whose time is worth much more than your own.¹⁰

But Dyar viewed himself as their equal and, by 1896, he was doing the admonishing. Dyar objected to Henry Skinner's lack of interest in larval characters, writing in *The Canadian Entomologist*,

Dr. Skinner says: “I may say right here that I believe the imago the culmination of nature's efforts, and that while studies of transformations are most valuable, they will not solve the problem of specific difference or identity.” This is not the

view of a careful student of the subject, but reads like an excuse for neglecting studies of the early stages. As if the larva were not often the "culmination of nature's effort," as in *Apatela* or the *Limacodidae*, or as if the forces determining the struggle for existence must always impinge most strongly on the same stage in all species (Dyar 1896a, 306).

When Skinner deplored the tone of Dyar's critique as ungentlemanly, Dyar only replied, "I beg that you will study the larvae more thoroughly than you appear to have done, before you make other sweeping generalizations or take offence at deserved criticism."¹¹

By 1897, Dyar had a solid publication record of descriptions, numerous short notes, critiques, and well-crafted life histories and had coauthored the monograph on *Acronycta* (Smith & Dyar 1898). Other taxonomists were now writing to Dyar for identifications and to discuss problems of higher classification of macrolepidoptera. Scientific expertise was not all Dyar gained from his correspondence. Grote, for example, exposed Dyar to contemporary debates over higher classification and nomenclature. In this way he also became privy to the personal feuds between taxonomists such as Grote and J. B. Smith.¹²

Custodian of the National Lepidoptera Collections

As the nineteenth century ended, the premier entomological collection in the nation was being amassed at the United States National Museum (USNM) in Washington, D.C. Charles Valentine Riley, chief of the Bureau of Entomology at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), served as honorary curator of the museum collection. He was assisted by lepidopterist John Bernard Smith and Leland Ossian Howard, who had come to Washington from Cornell. Dyar began correspondence with Riley and Smith over entomological matters in 1889. After Riley resigned from the USDA in 1894 and died in 1895, Howard was appointed chief of the bureau and then honorary curator of the national insect collection. Howard soon began sending moths to Dyar for identification. The two men met in 1896 when Dyar again visited Washington, D.C. Howard promptly raised the possibility of a Smithsonian appointment for Dyar as custodian of the national Lepidoptera collections. Today, the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) of the Smithsonian employs eleven curators of

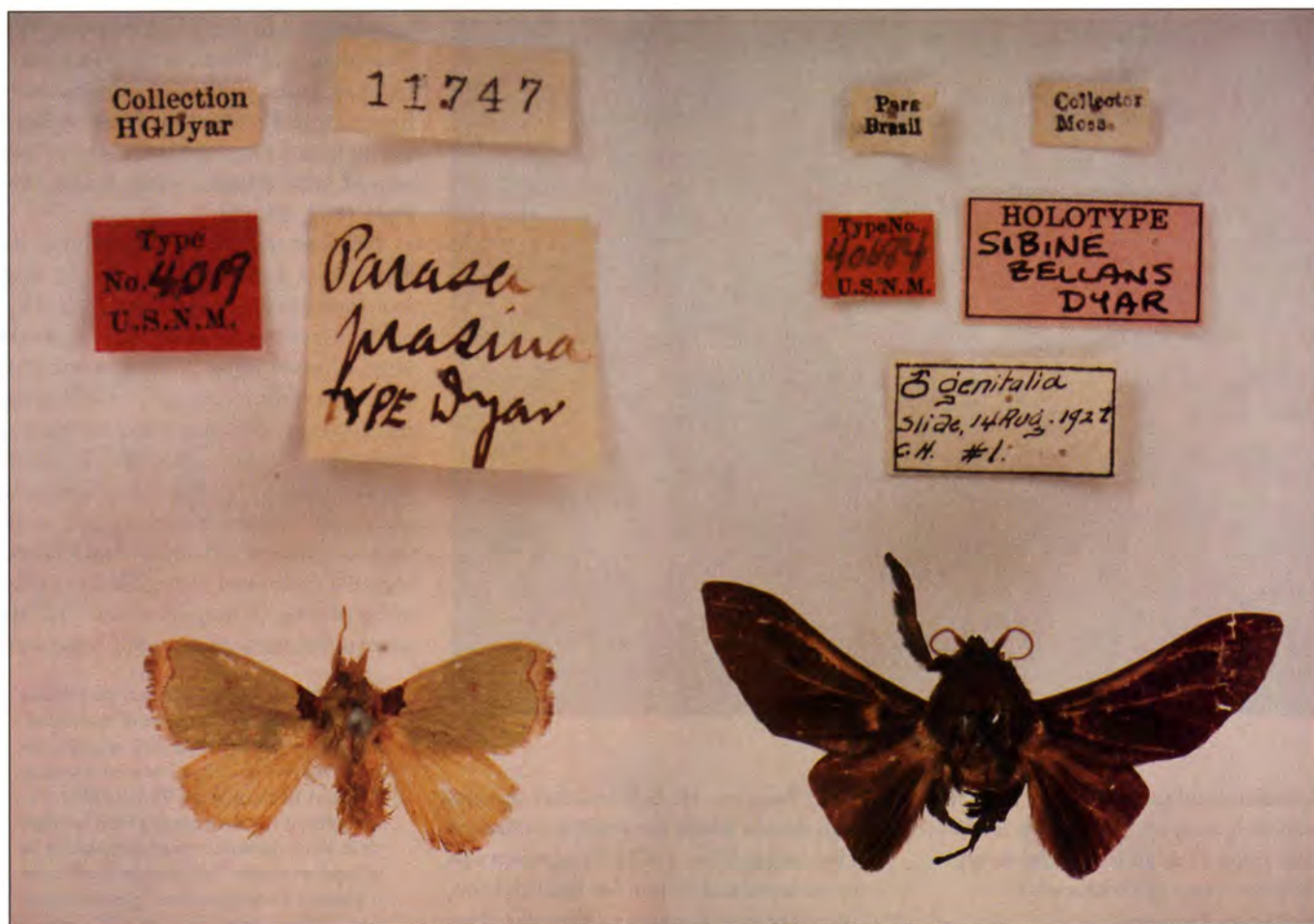
entomology and numerous support staff, but at that time the entomology staff of the USNM consisted of a single curator, William Harris Ashmead, a specialist on Hymenoptera. The Lepidoptera collection was cared for by USDA staff, consisting of Howard, microlepidopterist August Busck (who arrived in 1896), and other aides (Anonymous 1976).¹³

The museum's need for Dyar's expertise became critical in 1897 upon the death of Martin Larsson Linnell, the USDA aide who had been caretaker of the Lepidoptera. At Howard's invitation, Dyar relinquished his faculty appointment at Columbia that year and came to the USNM as honorary custodian of Lepidoptera (Wetmore 1930). Unfortunately, neither USNM nor USDA could afford to pay Dyar a salary, despite Howard's efforts to secure one. Dyar's independent means allowed him to work on the national collections gratis during this period, and Dyar enjoyed certain perquisites as a result. Howard noted in an annual report that Dyar would prefer a paid appointment for six months of each year, so he would be free to travel and conduct fieldwork throughout the summers. The museum, however, did not respond.¹⁴

A lack of commitment on the part of the museum likely gave rise to a major Dyar myth that he never received or desired compensation for thirty-one years of work. In reports and memos to Smithsonian administrators, Howard requested a permanent, paid appointment for Dyar. In 1900, he remonstrated:

Furthermore, I wish once more in the strongest terms to call the attention of the Assistant Secretary in Charge of the Museum to the matter mentioned by me in my letter to him of June 11, the receipt of which has probably by inadvertence not been acknowledged. It relates to the great desirability of securing some compensation for Dr. H. G. Dyar, for his invaluable services gratuitously to the Museum for 2 years and I have promised him, encouraged first by promises from Mr. Walcott [Charles D. Walcott, Secretary of the Smithsonian] and next by promises from Dr. True [Frederick William True, head curator of biology, USNM], to make an effort to secure some compensation for him. He is discouraged at the apparent lack of appreciation which the Museum has shown and I am very anxious that this feeling of discouragement should not increase.¹⁵

In annual report after annual report, Howard noted the improved condition of



the Lepidoptera thanks to Dyar's work, in contrast to the sad state of the rest of the insect collection. Howard was acutely aware that Dyar was instrumental in securing several large collections, such as the Schaus Collection of Neotropical Lepidoptera, and wished to see him compensated for his efforts.¹⁶

The museum occasionally paid for Dyar's travel expenses when he was in the field collecting, but other support from the USNM was limited to space, supplies, and insect drawers. USDA proved more supportive, devoting several staff positions to the collections, paying for artists and supplies, and purchasing collections when they came on the market. Dyar was, in fact, on the USDA payroll at several junctures in his career. How and when those appointments were secured and lost are some of the threads making up the many-hued tapestry of Dyar's life.¹⁷

The addition of Dyar to the USNM custodial staff filled many of Howard's needs. As soon as he was appointed honorary custodian, Dyar turned to the task of organizing and consolidating the Lepi-

doptera collection. The specimens previously had been scattered between USDA and USNM buildings, a situation that annoyed Dyar. Dyar also performed much of the lepidopteran identification work for the museum and revised groups when necessary, based on his growing knowledge of the national collections. In the early years, Andrew N. Caudell served as Dyar's assistant in the afternoons. Dyar embarked upon a program of summer expeditions out west, accompanied by Caudell, who shared his zest for the field.¹⁸

Like most of his colleagues, Dyar attached great significance to the names he chose for species in the USNM collection. For example, he named a *Dendrolimus howardi* after L. O. Howard, and, what will prove more intriguing later in our story, in 1900 he renamed a homonym *Parasa prasina* Dyar to *Parasa wellesca*, after "Miss Wellesca Pollock of Washington" (Dyar 1900, 1905a). Wellesca Pollock accompanied Dyar on his trips west with Caudell and later became his second wife.¹⁹

Dyar's ultimate goal was to make USNM the premier repository for Lepidoptera in

Limacodid moths that Dyar named after his wives. Left: Syntype of *Parasa prasina*, a homonym Dyar renamed in 1900 after Wellesca Pollock (Allen Dyar). Right: Holotype of *Acharia* (= *Sibine*) *zellans* named in 1927 for his first wife Zella Peabody Dyar. Photo by Victor E. Krantz.



Entomological workers in the USNM collection area, ca. 1905. Dyar is third from right, Caudell is third from left. Photo courtesy of Smithsonian Institution Archives.

North America. He believed that the museum should house the voucher collection of the nation (Dyar 1902). Thus, when new species were sent to him for identification, Dyar usually negotiated to keep the types and cotypes (now called syntypes). In pursuit of this goal, he was dogged in his protection of the national collection and tight-fisted when it came to loaning specimens, especially types. Dyar was even reluctant to weed duplicates from the USNM cabinets.²⁰ He wrote to J. R. Horton in 1926, "I retain all specimens wherever possible, as I find it very desirable in case of review of determination later to have the specimens in the Natl. Coll. All such will be preserved as long as I am in charge."²¹ These attitudes engendered stresses in the entomological community. Economic entomologists often objected to this policy, complaining that they needed at least some specimens for identification work at experiment and field stations.²² In later years the policy led to serious conflicts with collector William Barnes.

Because Dyar did not wish to organize the collection in accordance with the older classifications in J. B. Smith's 1891 *List of the Lepidoptera of Boreal America*, he prepared *A List of North American Lepidoptera and Key to the Literature of this Order of Insects* of 1903. This publication also served as a wish list for the national Lepidoptera collection. Dyar based his checklist in part on the new evolutionary classifications be-

ing proposed by himself, Comstock, T. A. Chapman, and Grote, with contributions by Busck, Hulst, and Fernald. Unlike Smith's treatment in his checklist, Dyar wished to use the names proposed in Hübner's *Tentamen* of 1806 (Hübner 1806; Smith 1891; Dyar 1902, 1903b).²³

Although deadly serious in their disagreements, Dyar's duels with the entomologists of this era are characterized by a wit and incisiveness rarely seen today. He wrote of Smith's work, "The synoptic tables seem somewhat overdone. I would not say that the characters used are sometimes imaginary, yet they verge upon this definition" (Dyar 1903a, 171). One of the best known exchanges occurred between Dyar, as editor of the *Journal of the New York Entomological Society*, and Henry Skinner, editor of *Entomological News* (Mallis 1971). Dyar wrote of Skinner's catalogue of Rhopalocera:

Dr. Skinner has given us a very useful little supplement to his catalogue of butterflies. It is somewhat bristling with typographical errors and blunders, but we are used to that sort of thing from Philadelphia. . . . The generic names have not been brought up to date, the author expressly stating he is "not interested" in the subject, which he is pleased to designate as "generic fantasies." This is, we think a fault. It is easy to stigmatize what one will not take the trouble to understand; but a good opportunity of correcting the antiquated nomenclature of the North American butterflies has here been lost (Dyar 1905c).

Dyar preferred to follow Samuel H. Scudder's generic treatment in his *List*, whereas Skinner had relied on the work of William Henry Edwards. Neither scientist chose to give ground. Skinner replied in his journal that Dyar's review was

a gratuitous insult to me or to all the Philadelphia entomologists, including the illustrious dead. . . . If anyone familiar with the Hesperidae will consult Dr. Dyar's review of the family he will find generic fantasies to satiation (Skinner 1905).²⁴

Skinner leavened the science in *Entomological News* with poems, stories, and humor. The exchanges resumed when Dyar needed Skinner for publishing a popular and financially successful journal.

I am delighted with the little sarcastic paragraphs you have been putting in the *News*. Good—keep it up! As you gain experience you might add humorous illustrations and gradually come to rival *Puck* and *Life*, of course in an entomological way.²⁵

And later he tweaked,

Are you not rather going in for "yellow journalism" in the *News*. That is something new in entomology I think. You might change the color of the covers and come out in yellow instead of pink as heretofore and so be appropriate.²⁶

These entomologists enjoyed a good fight and enlivened the scientific journals of the day; however, the acerbic tone Dyar assumed with colleagues often went beyond scientific debate and soured into personal bitterness. This pattern can be seen especially in the arguments over the usefulness of larval characters, the use of the *Tentamen*, and whether to follow Edwards' or Scudder's generic concepts of butterflies. Dyar was no less gentle with his less-educated colleagues. Myth has it that Dyar coined the pejorative "mihi itch" to describe the practice often attributed to amateurs (and some professionals) of describing varieties as species in order to have a species named "of me."²⁷ He also had little patience with printed notes of observations from amateurs that duplicated information already in print. A Dyar note entitled "'New' Facts That Are Not New" provoked a storm of replies from amateurs and professionals alike that Dyar was "manifestly unjust" and given to "unnecessary and caustic rebukes" (Dyar 1905b, 1906; Soule 1905; Skinner 1906).

The strengths and weaknesses of Dyar's temperament were illustrated further by his conflicts with the physician and collector William Barnes. Barnes had amassed a superb collection of North American Lepidoptera in his Decatur, Ill., home (Gunder 1929). Both men were devoted to the study of Lepidoptera and maintained a correspondence, but their relationship was characterized by friction. When he was asked to describe a new species by a collector such as Barnes, Dyar insisted on retaining the types; indeed, he retained as many of the specimens in the type series as he could get away with. Dyar was reluctant to send specimens, especially types, through the mail to other workers, despite the fact that collectors such as Barnes were frequent contributors to the national collection.²⁸

Matters came to a head when Barnes and James Halliday McDunnough began revising groups of North American Lepidoptera in preparation for a new checklist (Barnes & McDunnough 1912-1916). Barnes claimed that Dyar refused to loan or even

photograph specimens for him. In late 1912, Barnes went so far as to request that his senator, William B. McKinley, Jr., pressure L. O. Howard, chief of the Bureau of Entomology, to remove Dyar from charge of the national collection. No action seems to have been taken against Dyar; indeed, it is uncertain he ever knew of Barnes' action against him. Howard, however, clearly felt caught in the middle. Upon reviewing Dyar's vitriolic critique of a Barnes paper, Howard urged him to moderate its tone and avoid provoking Barnes. When the Barnes and McDunnough checklist appeared in 1917, Dyar objected to their practice of revising classifications without explanation and their failure to cite his earlier checklist and taxonomic papers.²⁹ His published review of the checklist began:

The gentlemen from Illinois have published again. For persons already under criticism, this is nothing short of an "overt act," and the temptation is strong once more to obtain their *Caprae hirci*. However, this time I will temper my wind to the shorn lambs (Dyar 1917).

Despite the enmity between them, Dyar urged Barnes to consult the national collections. Dyar even wrote to Barnes offering a truce so he could assist Barnes in the preparation of *The Catalogue of North American Lepidoptera*, which was to follow the checklist. In characteristic fashion, Dyar wrote,

I wish you to study this collection and to accept what assistance I can give for the benefit of your catalogue, without feeling any hesitation on personal grounds. Afterward hostilities may be resumed according to circumstances.³⁰

If Dyar had little patience with colleagues, he had even less with bureaucratic procedures and inefficiency. He wanted real life to conform to his idealistic expectations of efficiency and logic. In letters to T.D.A. Cockerell, for example, he railed against the bureaucratic chain of steps necessary to ship specimens, a procedure in which, for all its detail, no one individual ever seemed to take responsibility. Dyar's strong and widely voiced opinions served mainly to place him in conflict with museum officials, so that when a USNM curatorial position became available in 1908, James C. Crawford was hired rather than Dyar (Anonymous 1976).³¹

Museum administrators may not have held Dyar in great esteem, but it was unde-

niable that under Dyar's custodianship the national collection of Lepidoptera prospered. And Howard, who was honorary curator of the museum collection, remained a staunch supporter of Dyar. By the 1910s, Dyar was a nationally recognized figure, and Howard was able to appoint him a USDA "expert" at an annual salary of \$1,800. His 1903 checklist of the Lepidoptera, with its revised classifications, served as a general reference and standard (Heinrich 1929, Anonymous 1947). Not only was Dyar president of the Entomological Society of Washington from 1902 to 1903, he was also editor of the *Journal of the New York Entomological Society* from 1904 to 1907 (Weiss 1943) and on the editorial board of the *Proceedings of the Entomological Society of Washington* from 1908 to 1912 (Wade 1936, Gurney 1976). In 1913, Dyar initiated his own journal, *Insecutor Inscitiae Menstruus* (IIM), which he published until 1926. Although Dyar dedicated the journal to the lepidopterist Augustus Radcliffe Grote, he sought "short original articles, especially in orders of insects other than Lepidoptera" (Dyar 1913). In fact, Dyar's own contributions to the IIM reflected his growing interest in New World mosquitoes. The IIM gave Dyar control of the editorial process and allowed him rapid publication of his own descriptions.³²

Never one to confine himself to a single group, Dyar began rearing and publishing on mosquito larvae in the early 1900s, as his interest in sawflies waned (Dyar 1901). In 1904, he wrote *Diverse Mosquito Larvae that Produce Similar Adults*, the first of a series of papers on mosquitoes with Frederick Knab, an assistant to L. O. Howard at USDA (Dyar & Knab 1904). Mosquitoes were an important topic during these years, as their medical importance became established during the construction of the Panama Canal. Howard had long been interested in mosquitoes (Howard 1901) but encouraged Knab and Dyar to pick up this group as he devoted more time to administration. Dyar made extensive collections in North and Central America, identified the flood of specimens coming into USDA and USNM, and picked up the slack as Knab's health failed in 1916 from leishmaniasis (Howard 1933). From 1912 to 1917, Howard, Dyar, and Knab wrote a series of monographs on the mosquitoes of North and Central America (Howard et al. 1912–1917).

Despite his late entry into this family, Dyar produced at least 207 mosquito pub-

lications, 156 in his name alone (Knight & Pugh 1974, Knight & Stone 1977). He stabilized the classification of Culicidae and other nematoceros Diptera through his use of male genitalia (Dyar 1918, 1922; Aldrich 1929; Mallis 1971). Dyar became so well known for his mosquito work that his newspaper obituary read, "Services for Dr. H. G. Dyar, Mosquito Expert." It is interesting to note that on the sixtieth anniversary of his death, he was honored primarily for his contributions to mosquito taxonomy (McLean 1988).³³

Personal Life and Pastimes

When Dyar settled down to life in Washington, he purchased two adjoining houses at 1510 and 1512 21st Street, N.W., a fashionable residential district several miles north of the museum. The 1512 house was occupied by his growing family—wife Zella (1869–1938), daughter Dorothy (1896–1965), son Otis Peabody, (1900–1968), and mother-in-law Harriet M. Peabody, as well as a cook and a maid. Dyar reared moth and mosquito larvae at the 1510 house, which was connected to the Dyar home, and the children roamed freely between the two dwellings.³⁴

But by 1914, Dyar's marriage to Zella fell apart amidst suspicions that Dyar had a second family with his spiritual advisor, Wellesca Pollock Allen. Dyar had known Wellesca Pollock since at least 1900, when he renamed a species of limacodid *Parasa wellesca* (Dyar 1900, 1905a). Wellesca began to accompany Dyar on his collecting trips west in the early 1900s and assisted him with his *List of North American Lepidoptera* of 1903 (Dyar 1903b). They may have met at Stony Man Mountain in the Shenandoahs of Virginia, where Wellesca's brother, George Freeman Pollock, had developed the Skyland resort (Pollock 1920). Dyar and Wellesca visited the area throughout their lives; he built a cabin there called Peter Pan and she had one named Laurel Lodge. Wellesca became a frequent visitor to the Dyar home, as Dyar became a convert to her Bahá'í faith.³⁵

In 1906, Wellesca Pollock married one Wilfred P. Allen in Richmond, Va., and she had three sons over the next decade. During this period, Dyar built a home for her and her children at 804 B Street, S.W., which would now be 804 Independence Avenue, directly across the street from the National Museum. In the 1910 census, the B Street

house listed a Wilfred P. Allen, who had been born in Michigan three years after Dyar, Wellesca Pollock Allen, and a Wilfred P. Allen, Jr.

In the decade since Wellesca's marriage, no one had ever seen the mysterious "Mr. Allen." Wellesca and Dyar claimed that Allen lived in Philadelphia for financial reasons and that Wellesca visited him there. Dyar now spent much of his time at the B Street house and had placed several additional properties in Wellesca's name. Zella Dyar grew increasingly suspicious of her husband's close relationship with Wellesca and her growing family. She suggested that Mr. Allen make at least one visit to Washington to stem the malicious gossip that annoyed her husband, but Mr. Allen never appeared. It was even rumored that no such person actually existed and that Dyar had posed as Allen.³⁶

Zella Dyar had the house at 804 B Street searched in 1915 and consulted a lawyer to file for divorce. Dyar moved to Reno, Nev., and filed for divorce from Zella in 1916. As the trial approached, Dyar suffered a nervous collapse as his always high-strung temperament reached its breaking point. Wellesca moved to Reno to nurse him back to health as he developed serious heart problems as well. She also filed for divorce but was unable to secure one, perhaps because she again could not produce Mr. Allen. In September 1916, a divorce decree favorable to Zella was granted. Thereafter, Dyar boarded with Wellesca at the 804 B Street house until their marriage in 1921.³⁷

Wellesca was from a family noted as pioneers in the kindergarten movement in the United States, and she had been a kindergarten and music teacher in Washington, D.C. She and Dyar shared many interests, including a love of music. At their home, one might find "the Doctor seated at the piano, lost in the strains of one of Rachmaninoff's Symphonies." Wellesca was actively involved in Dyar's pursuit of scientific knowledge, accompanying him on field trips and helping with specimen preparation. He discussed his work with her. In 1922, for example, he read her a particularly offensive piece on mosquitoes by a colleague, "till she asked me to stop, as she did not want to hear more of such entomological heresies." The couple shared a home filled with children, music, art, science, and religion (Robinson 1929).³⁸

Wellesca was an ardent disciple of the Bahá'í faith, a movement that accepts the

divine inspiration of all religions and seeks to reconcile science with religion and to promote universal peace and equality. She had traveled to the Middle East to study with the leader of the Bahá'í faith, Ábdu'l-Bahá, who gave her the name Aseyah. Dyar was introduced to the Bahá'í movement by his first wife Zella's mother, Harriet M. Peabody. He later joined Wellesca in this belief. Dyar's parents had been spiritualists; indeed, his mother had claimed to be a medium. Unlike his parents, Dyar was a thoroughgoing materialist, interested in ethical and moral tenets rather than the supernatural (Anonymous 1924).³⁹

Dyar even served as editor of *Reality*, an independent Bahá'í journal, from 1922 until his death in 1929 (Smith 1984). The journal contains a fascinating set of short stories by Dyar that replay many of the themes of his life, especially his two marriages. In "An Anecdote of the Law," the protagonist had been "courting two girls to the onest, the rascal. . . and the thought o' possessing one made him sad at the thought o' losing the other." In the end, he manages to marry his two sweethearts at the same time, thus avoiding bigamy. The topics of the short stories range from local color to detective to science fiction, and they provide a vehicle for Dyar's ironic sense of humor (Dyar 1927a).

During these years, *Reality* published spirited debates between scientist Dyar and his more religious brethren on issues such as the role of God as first cause. As part of eugenic philosophy, Wellesca and Dyar maintained that the primary purpose of marriage was to have children (A.W.P.A. Dyar 1920, Dyar & Dyar 1922). Proud of his derivation from "old New England stock," Dyar advocated the production of large families by such "superior stock" in order to accelerate the evolution of the human race (Dyar 1924). It is not known if this philosophy influenced their decision to start a family.⁴⁰

Dyar maintained ties with his children from both families after his divorce. He apparently visited his first family at their new home in Berkeley, Calif., since Zella allowed letters to be forwarded to him there. His continuing regard for Zella can be seen in the limacodid species he named after her in 1927 (Dyar 1927b). He also took an active interest in the education and careers of the children of his first marriage. Worried about his son Otis, Dyar wrote to Howard,



Tales of Dyar's eccentric hobby resurfaced in 1958 after the tunnels collapsed behind the houses at 1510 and 1512 21st St., N.W., then owned by Eleanor and Lewis Curd. Above, Curd children explore Dyar's tunnel. Washington Post (25 May 1958): A3, photo by Frank Hoy.

I have a son, aged 24, whose work is bad for his health. If you can use him in the proposed mosquito exploration, keep me advised. I cannot furnish him gratis, but on same conditions as you pay others. He could join your Dept. if desired.⁴¹

His daughter, Dorothy, stayed in touch with her father and even wrote an article for the Bahá'í magazine he edited (D. Dyar 1923).⁴²

Dyar and Wellesca had three sons, Wilfred P., Harrison G., and Wallace P. Allen. The boys were adopted by Dyar in 1923 and took their father's last name. They were also given Persian names, furnished by the Ábdu'l-Bahá, Wellesca's spiritual leader. Wilfred was given the name Roshan, meaning illumination and light, and thereafter was known as Roshan W. Dyar. Harrison

was given the middle name of Golshan, for rose garden or beauty. Wallace's middle name became Joshan, signifying breastplate and protection.⁴³

Although legend has it that the children from the two families discovered their shared father at a high school function, their disparate ages rule this out. That scenario most likely has its origin in the 1958 film *The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker*, starring Clifton Webb and Dorothy Maguire. This comedy chronicled the comings and goings between Philadelphia and Harrisburg of an 1890s bigamist.⁴⁴

Another Dyar myth, that he dug tunnels as secret passages to connect the two households, is false. He did excavate tunnels behind both the 21st and B Street homes, but they were located several miles apart, and even Dyar did not attempt such a Herculean task. He later recalled that in 1905 or 1906,

Mrs. [Zella] Dyar wanted a bed of hollyhocks, and a little garden for vegetables . . . You know the hollyhock grows best if the earth under for many feet is loosened. The roots of the hollyhock penetrate very deep into the ground. Well, I volunteered to dig the garden. When I was down perhaps six or seven feet, surrounded only by the damp brown walls of old Mother Earth, I was seized with an undeniable fancy to keep on going.⁴⁵

Dyar did keep on going, excavating a labyrinth of underground tunnels, six-feet high, extending some two hundred feet, with walls of brick and plaster.⁴⁶

The tunnels remained Dyar's secret pastime until 1924, when a truck backed into the alley behind the 21st Street houses, collapsing the ground beneath it. Dyar had moved from the neighborhood after his divorce, and the houses had passed through a succession of owners. Hence, no one knew how the tunnels had come to be. Front page newspaper headlines proclaimed: "Old Tunnel Here Believed To Have Been Used By Teuton War Spies and Bootleggers!" Speculation centered on secret romances and lairs for bootleggers and robbers. Theories about Teuton spies were suggested by the German language newspapers used to plaster the walls.⁴⁷ The *Washington Post* reported:

One of the most authentic stories concerning the tunnels which could be gathered traces their origin to the Civil War, when they may have been used for the protection of Confederate soldiers hiding in

Washington. Subsequently, it is stated, the labyrinth came into the possession of Dr. Otto von Golph, a German chemist, who embellished and furnished them. The chemist then is believed to have employed the underground chambers as laboratories for his scientific experiments.⁴⁸

The story made newspapers as far away as *The Boston Evening Transcript*. A police guard was needed as the public flocked to see the mysterious underground maze and reporters searched for explanations. The trail finally led to Dyar, who admitted to his strange pastime. A *Washington Evening Star* interview with the retiring scientist dispelled images of a Frankensteinian lair. Complimented for his construction skills, the naturalist smiled, "Well, I never was taught engineering or how to lay bricks. I've spent my life chasing bugs."⁴⁹ The German language newspapers, he explained, were not from World War I spies but from German friends, dated from before the war. The tunnels were such a sensation that they even made it into the political cartoon arena for "Fighting Bob" LaFollette's presidential campaign.⁵⁰

Dyar had continued his nighttime excavations behind the B Street house, across from the museum. These tunnels facilitated the removal of ashes from a basement furnace, but they were not purely functional. They were illuminated electrically and, on the walls, were sculpted heads of persons and animals. The archways were inscribed with Latin mottos, such as "Facilis Decensus Averno" ("It is with ease, we descend to the lower region") (Robinson 1929). Both sets of tunnels led absolutely nowhere and certainly did not connect the two households. The children from both families helped with the excavations and played with their father in the tunnels. Thus, the labyrinths seemed to have served no secret purpose. City building officials warned Dyar to secure permits for future excavations, but they were reluctant to halt his hobby altogether. Over the ensuing decades, the tunnels behind both homes have periodically come to light, fueling anew speculation as to their origin and purpose, reviving tales about the eccentric entomologist.⁵¹

One can only wonder where Dyar found the time to pursue his active career on several taxonomic groups, amass a large personal collection, raise two families, edit scientific and religious journals, engage in hobbies as diverse as stamp collecting and classical piano, and dig tunnels. The stresses



of work and home life did take their toll. For the last fourteen years of his life, Dyar had a serious heart condition and repeatedly suffered from nervous spells. But his active life and high-strung temperament may have had a medical basis. Dyar was treated for goiter for many years, perhaps a symptom of a hyperactive thyroid. However, neither personal, medical, nor professional problems could stem Dyar's passion for entomology during his final years. As Wellesca recalled,

How he lived for his work! Even on Sundays throughout the years he would go to his work at 1 o'clock and remain till 4.30. His work was a part of his life and he was happiest when at it.⁵²

The Final Decade

Despite Dyar's attempts to keep his divorce from Zella out of the Washington limelight, word somehow reached the administration of USDA and an investigation was begun. Dyar continued to collect in the West (Essig 1931) and identify specimens for the museum, but his work suffered dur-

House at 804 B St., S.W., Washington, D.C., where Dyar and Wellesca's family resided. The X marks the location of the tunnels.

"An Anecdote of the Law"—A Story

by Harrison G. Dyar

"Speaking o' the law reminds me how Phil Utterly took his case to court. Ha, Ha, that was a funny suit. I'll wager you never heard of it, Jane, me girl.

"Well, Phil was a young feller then and inclined to be frisky as young fellers will, and some old ones, too. He'd been courting two girls to onest, the rascal, till it came to near the point o' popping the question, and then he came to a difficulty. He didn't know which he preferred, and the thought o' possessing one made him sad at the thought o' losing the other. But as matters stood he had neither, so something must be done, d'you see? Yet if he proposed to Susan and was accepted, he'd lose all chance o' Gladys. And if he proposed to Gladys and was taken, Susan was gone for fair. O' course he might be rejected—Phil Utterly never was a conceited ass, and he realized he might be rejected, and if he could have been sure of being rejected by one and taken by the other, the coast would have been clear, d'you see? But supposing he were rejected by both! Lord, Lord, was there ever such a difficulty? But he keeps up his courting just the same.

"One night he was calling on Gladys. 'Tee-hee,' says she, 'you've been comin' to see me a right smart while, Phil Utterly, tee-hee, tee-hee.'

"That I have, Gladys,' he says, 'dear me, ah hum, heigh ho.'

"Why do you make them groans and sighs?' says she.

"It must be 'cause I'm in love,' says he.

"Tee-hee,' says she, 'do I know her?'

"You do not,' says he. 'Her name is Susan.'

"Susan? [sic] says she, looking at him sharp like, 'is that so? Then why do you come around here a seeing' o' me?'

Excerpted from a story by Dyar, which appeared in Reality Magazine, April 1927.

ing this period of separation from libraries and collections. He made plans to return to the museum "however the Investigatorial Cat jumps." But after reviewing claims that Dyar had signed Wellesca's marriage certificate as Wilfred P. Allen, the Secretary of Agriculture dismissed Dyar in June of 1917 from his position as "expert" for actions deemed inappropriate for a government employee.⁵³

It would have been devastating for Howard if Dyar had been dismissed from his honorary position at the museum in addition to the USDA. Howard had long relied on Dyar for help with identification and curation of Lepidoptera. In the 1910s, Dyar had begun to play a more pivotal role in the mosquito work, as Knab's health

failed and Howard's administrative duties increased (Howard 1933). Dyar kept an eye on his ailing colleague, driving him to the museum and adding Knab's identifications to his work load.⁵⁴

Soon after the divorce, Dyar was back at his desk in the museum, still devoted to the national collections. As Dyar noted in a letter to his colleague August Busck, he hoped to retain his position as honorary custodian at the museum and still had a "string in my bow." Perhaps that string was the donation of his personal collection of some 35,000 specimens to the museum that year.⁵⁵

Dyar turned to the backlog of identifications and saw the final volume of *The Mosquitoes of North and Central America and the West Indies* by Howard, Knab, and himself to press (Howard et al. 1912–1917). But Dyar's colleagues did not adjust easily to his return. Several of his adversaries outside of the museum were pushing to have William Schaus replace Dyar as custodian of Lepidoptera. When Dyar reasserted his role as custodian after his long absence, conflicts resurfaced. In one memorable incident, Dyar attempted to hire a female preparator away from August Busck. Fireworks erupted in the hall of the National Museum. Busck suggested Dyar "study the ten commandments," presumably with a keen eye to the sixth. Busck had earned Dyar's enmity by allowing the collector, William Barnes, to remove specimens from the national collection while Dyar was out west for his divorce.⁵⁶

Predictably, hostilities flared between Dyar and Barnes. On several occasions, notably in 1920 and 1925, Barnes visited the USNM while Dyar was out of town and again removed specimens without asking Dyar's permission or even noting what he had taken. The act was especially offensive to Dyar because Barnes had taken specimens of limacodids reared by Dyar, his "most cherished treasures." Barnes felt justified in doing so because he had contributed so many specimens to the collection over the years.⁵⁷ Barnes complained to Howard,

As the National Museum had something over two hundred specimens it did not seem that we were doing any great harm to take out eight or ten specimens. Dyar in one instance when he described a species made 1400 cotypes or possibly it was 2400. I suppose every one of these had a history and a record too and he would hate to part with one of them.⁵⁸

Howard tried to mediate the conflict, but agreed with Dyar that specimens could not be removed without documentation and permission. Perhaps it was tit for tat, but Barnes declared that he would not donate his collection to the USNM as long as Dyar was in charge. But by 1922 he wished to find a permanent home for the collection, and his choice was the National Museum. He used his considerable political influence to have a bill introduced into the U.S. Congress for the USNM to purchase the collection for \$300,000. The proceeds of the sale were to benefit a hospital Barnes had established (Gunder 1929). Although Barnes feared Dyar would interfere with the purchase, Dyar strongly supported such an addition. In 1920, he wrote to Howard,

While I am not a friend of Dr. Barnes (for reasons which I can state and prove), I have not forbidden him the collection, and I will receive him with politeness. I will let him take material which, in my judgment can be spared, and this has always been my attitude. I wish to treat him well for the reason that he may be induced to leave us his collection.⁵⁹

Barnes and his supporters lobbied the entomological community and Congress for passage of the bill. Reaction was mixed, especially to the high price. Barnes also worried that Dyar's charges against him could jeopardize the sale; indeed, a nephew who worked on Capitol Hill reported to Barnes that he had succeeded in arranging the removal of damaging correspondence from the USDA files. In the end, Barnes' heavy-handed political approach failed. The bill eventually passed in 1930, but at the greatly reduced sum of \$50,000 for 473,000 specimens—a bargain for the largest Lepidoptera collection ever purchased by the government (Clarke 1974).⁶⁰

Dyar had conflicts with William Schaus as well. Dyar had been instrumental in bringing Schaus and his superb neotropical collection to the USNM. Initially, the two enjoyed a warm friendship, but over the years, their relationship deteriorated. In 1918, Dyar had supported Schaus' appointment as honorary associate custodian but objected to the more prestigious title of honorary assistant curator given to Schaus in 1920. Dyar believed that museum officials now regarded Schaus, rather than himself, as the person in charge of the collection. Dyar protested the change to Howard, noting that he had been misled by Leonhard Stejneger, head curator of biology. The

titles were not changed, but, as usual, Howard used his considerable diplomatic talents to smooth over the ruffled feathers. It is doubtful that Dyar would have continued at the museum if Howard had not always been there to calm the troubled waters.⁶¹

In his mosquito work, Dyar continued his habit of lively debate with colleagues. His critiques of Clara S. Ludlow and Frederick Vincent Theobald were vintage Dyar. From his vantage at the British Museum, Theobald simply ignored Dyar's vituperation. Ludlow, however, worked on mosquitoes for the U.S. Army Medical Museum, next door to the USNM. Although Ludlow held a Ph.D., Dyar regarded her as a rank amateur and savaged her methods and writings. Ludlow, who equally enjoyed a good fight, responded in kind. Despite Dyar's earlier attacks, she coauthored three papers with Dyar during 1921 and 1922 (Dyar & Ludlow 1921a, 1921b, 1922; Kitzmiller 1982). Dyar remained remorseless about his views on Ludlow.⁶² After her death in 1924, he pushed for transfer of her specimens, first to the medical museum and eventually, of course, to the USNM (Dyar & Shannon 1925). Wryly referring to his own deteriorating financial status, Dyar still gleefully reported to Howard,

Bad day for the stock market, but good for skeets. Major Callender sent word that due to the scare caused by you butting in, the Ludlow executors "coughed up" all the rest of the mosquito material, and it is now in the Army Medical Museum.⁶³

How she must be turning in her grave to think of ME pawing over her treasures and noting all her mistakes and blunders.⁶⁴

Howard was delighted that so much material had been exhumed and wrote, "Perhaps the story you will tell eventually will be comparable to the famous 'Ausgegrabenes Buch.'"⁶⁵

In the ensuing decade, Dyar repeatedly appealed his dismissal from USDA, but to no avail. His finances had deteriorated because of bad real estate deals and investments, the bankrolling of his entomological activities, and his divorce settlement. Thus, he pleaded with Howard to find a paying position for him at the museum or elsewhere. The museum remained steadfast in its refusal to hire Dyar, especially as his relations with museum administrators continued to be acrimonious.⁶⁶

Dyar occasionally secured support for his mosquito work as a reserve army officer

in the U.S. Sanitary Corps (Heinrich 1929). He traveled to Panama in 1923 to collect mosquitoes, and in 1924, he playfully reported to Howard,

I just got word that I am a captain in the Army. I salute the Bureau and its amiable Chief on behalf of the Service.
Sincerely yours,
Capt. Harrison G. Dyar
Sn.—O.R.C., A.M., Ph.D.⁶⁷

When Dyar was out west, Howard had no one to rely on for identifications and often forwarded specimens cross-country for immediate attention. Hearing of the Panama trip, Howard wrote,

I am sorry that from April 1st to September 1st the mosquitoes of most of the United States will be in confusion. No one—not even the mosquitoes themselves—will know their names; and this may react disastrously on the public. However, I am glad that you are going to have a good trip, and hope that you will take the best of care of yourself while in Panama.⁶⁸

Dyar took up economic work as a source of income but had misgivings about his new responsibilities. Dyar wrote to Howard,

You know there is nothing I like less than killing mosquitoes. The mosquitoes are the subject of my interest, not their absence, and so I feel that all anti-mosquito work is directly detrimental to my special interest. I love to see the mosquitoes in vast swarms, and if I had my way, all the oil would be poured over the human exterminators. However, as a matter of what is expected of an individual by the community at large, I give the benefit of my experience when asked for.⁶⁹

Howard sympathized with Dyar. He shared the opinion that money was being wasted on the application of oil on nonpest species, in places where mosquitoes did not breed, and on unnecessary second applications.⁷⁰ Treatment of mosquitoes at national parks, especially Yosemite National Park, particularly upset Dyar and Howard. In 1927, Howard sparked a controversy with the park managers when he decried these practices in a speech to the American Public Health Association. Dyar supported Howard's position, stating,

Every hollow that could not be drained or filled is full of stinking oil. Every marsh plant and hundreds of marsh insects are a thing of the past. Bird food must be greatly reduced. This Park, that should have kept

[sic] preserved in a wild state resembles a city lawn, ruined biologically.⁷¹

At Yellowstone, the same problems arose when tourist bites by black flies were misdiagnosed as mosquitoes. Dyar continued,

Next thing they will be digging, tearing up and destroying the pretty rivers so the tourists won't be bitten. Why not do it right? Blast the whole place down with dynamite and steam shovels and plant it smoothly to lawn grass?⁷²

The two men shared a passion for insects and sharp wits, and they held one another in enduring mutual respect and affection for the thirty years they worked together. Howard was a deft manager who accepted and worked around his colleagues' strengths and weaknesses. He knew Dyar was temperamental but genuinely enjoyed his wit and valued his work ethic. He regarded Dyar as the American expert on mosquitoes and respected the originality of thought Dyar brought to taxonomic work (Howard 1933). Howard was a consummate diplomat who retained his position in the federal bureaucracy by smoothing ruffled feathers with humor and kindness. He was often able to balance the needs of the USDA and museum to mutual advantage, while keeping administrative demands to a minimum (Mallis 1971). This respite from red tape and authority seems to have been valued by subordinates such as Dyar and August Busck.⁷³

By his final year, Dyar had lost all his money and again tried to secure a position at the National Museum or to be reinstated at USDA. He took a second mortgage on the B Street house and faced the prospect that his oldest son from the second marriage, Roshan, would have to leave Purdue University. Wellesca's heart disease kept her either in the hospital or confined to the second floor of their house. Dyar's health was failing as well, as the years of stress and hard work took their toll. In fall 1928, he had difficulty bouncing back from a bad bout of gripe.⁷⁴

In 1928, Dyar appealed to the USDA administration for reinstatement one last time, explaining his financial straits. Howard had been succeeded by Charles Lester Marlatt, and the senior USDA administration had changed as well. Howard and Marlatt were squarely behind the effort to reappoint Dyar as mosquito expert. Dyar had solidified his standing in the community with

publication of his monumental *Mosquitoes of the Americas* (Dyar 1928). He retained his sense of humor through these trying times, noting to Howard, "Many thanks for the letter you wrote to Dr. Marlatt. I am glad that I lost my money to hear such splendid appreciation." The wheels to bring Dyar back into full-time government service were set in motion, but they did not turn fast enough. Dyar was notified that he would be reappointed, and Marlatt wrote up a job description. Dyar completed an annotated list of the mosquitoes of Montana for USDA on 11 January 1929. On 19 January, during his usual Saturday at the museum, Dyar suffered a stroke at his desk. He died two days later at Garfield Hospital, less than a month before his sixty-third birthday (Aldrich 1929, Anonymous 1929).⁷⁵

The knowledge that he was to be reappointed did bring some consolation to his friends. Wellesca wrote to Marlatt,

Many thanks for your good letter and for the untiring efforts you put forth to get Dr. Dyar reinstated. Like Moses, he did not get to the "promised land," but at least he had the satisfaction of knowing it was to be his in a short time.⁷⁶

Perhaps as a fitting epilogue, USDA purchased Dyar's 804 B Street home and library from Wellesca during the year following his death. Because Dyar died before he could be reinstated, Wellesca was unable to receive a pension. However, the sales helped ease the family's financial burden. There was an ulterior motive for the purchase, and one that would appeal to Dyar's sense of humor. The USDA wanted the tunnels for experiments in growing mushrooms!⁷⁷

Conclusion

Dyar's life is proof of the adage that truth is stranger than fiction. He was a complex individual with interests as diverse as music, religion, science, finance, and tunneling. He made significant contributions to entomology, especially in his early years, pioneering the use of larval characters. But the same perfectionism and devotion to entomology that drove him to such achievements also placed him in conflict with colleagues throughout the entomological community. He was unsparing in his criticism of work that did not meet his high standards. The wit and bite displayed in those critiques makes him a legendary figure of his era. The quality of Dyar's own



work, however, suffered during his periods of stress and absence from the museum.

The Dyar legends, however entertaining, fail to capture the complexity of his personality. While Dyar did engage in life-long feuds with colleagues, his relationships with his coworkers varied. A genus was, indeed, named *Dyaria*, but by a friend, not an enemy. Although Dyar is said to be a man who rarely smiled and had little to do with colleagues other than Knab, the Dyar-Howard and Dyar-Caudell correspondence

The last known photograph of Harrison Gray Dyar, 4 January 1929, with colleagues, W. Schaus, L. O. Howard, C. Heinrich, A. Busck, and F. H. Noyes. J. D. Gunder. 1929. Entomol. News 40: 280.

reveals a dry sense of humor and genuine affection between Dyar and these men.

In fiction writing, Dyar was able to vent a more literary and reflective side. His short stories are filled with irony, capturing and resolving many of the dilemmas Dyar faced in his own life. Their often humorous tone reflects the sly twinkle often seen in his eyes in photographs. The newspaper interviews capture this dimension as well. His serious writings in the Bahá'í magazine *Reality* cover a wide range of philosophical issues, from materialism to eugenics to family life.

The legends about Dyar's personal life are, for the most part, true; however, they fail to capture the complexity and range of his relationships. He did, indeed, have two families, but the stories of the children meeting in high school are a fabrication. Dyar legends also suggest that neither family knew about the other before 1914. Zella and Wellesca knew one another, and Zella had been suspicious of her husband's relationship with Wellesca from the outset. Despite his unusual marital situation, Dyar found time for all of his children, and some even participated in his tunnel-digging hobby. He maintained contact with the children from his first marriage even after the divorce. The tunnels themselves are of a size and extent far beyond what legends convey. They were truly amazing constructions, complete with masonry, artwork, and Latin inscriptions. If the tunnels served as an escape route, it was only from the demands of museum and family life.

Dyar left a significant legacy of scientific work and personal achievement, but he is a tragic figure. For many years, he used his considerable personal fortune to finance his entomological work for the museum. Stories that he never wanted or received an official position are false. Dyar wanted an official position for the status and authority it conveyed, as well as compensation. When his financial fortunes turned, difficult relations with coworkers and personal problems impeded him from securing financial compensation. Although Marlatt and Howard eventually arranged for his reinstatement, Dyar died literally days before he would have finally secured his coveted USDA position.

Dyar will long be remembered as a pioneering systematist and one of entomology's greatest characters. He leaves to his successors Dyar's law, voluminous numbers of life-history studies, his revisions of higher classifications, descriptions of species from

at least three orders, and the collections of Lepidoptera and Diptera he amassed. He leaves a legacy to the history of entomology as well, in legends about his relations with colleagues, odd hobbies, and family life. Although exploration of the labyrinth of Dyar's life has revealed the man behind the myth, he will continue to intrigue students for generations to come.

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22. L. O. Howard to Dyar, 9/3/14, 9/4/14, and Dyar to L. O. Howard, 9/4/14, and W. R. Walton to L. O. Howard, 2/20/18, NARA, RG7, E-34, b 125, f "Dy 4 of 5."
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28. W. Barnes to L. O. Howard, 9/9/13, 4/11/14, NARA, RG7, E-66, b 11.
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31. Dyar to T. D. A. Cockerell, 1/9/18, NARA, RG7, E-34, b 125, f "Dy 4 of 5"; L. O. Howard to Dyar, 4/3/08, and Dyar to L. O. Howard, 4/24/08, in NARA, RG7, b 3.
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33. *Washington Post* (1/23/29): 4; see also *Washington Star* (1/23/29): 9 and *New York Times* (1/22/29): 29.
34. Personal communication with Eleanor and Lewis Curd, present owners of houses at 1510 and 1512 21st Street. Thirteenth census of the United States, 1910, enumeration district #45, sheet 6B. Boyd's directory of the District of Columbia (Washington, D.C.: R. L. Polk, 1902, 1910, 1915).
35. A. N. Caudell to Dyar, 8/9/01, HGDP, b 1, f 3. Harrison G. Dyar versus Zella P. Dyar, 1/7/16, divorce case transcript, Washoe County Courthouse, Reno, Nevada. Wallace J. Dyar, personal communication with M. E. Epstein, 2/27/92.
36. *Dyar v. Dyar*, 1/7/16, transcript. Thirteenth census, 1910, enumeration district #58, sheet 4A. Washington City general assessment 1908-1909, 30, 270.
37. Dyar to L. O. Howard, 9/10/16, 5/24/17, 5/29/17, 1/10/18, NARA, RG7, E-34, b 125, f "Dy 4 of 5"; L. O. Howard to Dyar, 12/1/14, 12/14/14, 1/9/15, NARA, RG7, E-34, b 125, f "Dy 5 of 5." *Dyar v. Dyar* transcript. Wellesca P. Allen versus Wilfred P. Allen, 7/8/20, divorce case transcript, Washoe County Courthouse, Reno, Nevada. W. J. Dyar, personal communication with M. E. Epstein, 2/27/92. Boyd's directory (1917): 1339, 1667; (1919): 198, 535, 1581. Fourteenth census, 1920, enumeration district #73, sheet 3a.
38. Kindergarten teacher, *Washington Star* (12/16/02); Susan P. Pollock obituary, *Washington Herald* (1/10/24); Aseyah Wellesca P. Dyar obituary, *Washington Star* (6/23/40): A-12. Dyar to L. O. Howard, 8/16/22, NARA, RG7, E-34, b 125, f "Dy 1 of 5."
39. Wellesca Dyar obituary.
40. See also, for example, *Reality* 7 (June 1924): 17-20, 8 (August 1924): 29-30, 11 (January 1926): 49-50, and 15 (June 1928): 3.
41. Dyar to L. O. Howard, 3/18/24, NARA, RG7, E-34, b 124, f "Dy."
42. Dyar to L. O. Howard, 4/25/21, NARA, RG7, E-34, b 125, f "Dy 3 of 5."
43. Harrison Gray Dyar obituary, *Washington Star* (1/23/29): 9. Fourteenth census of the United States, 1920, enumeration district #73, sheet 3a. Wallace J. Dyar, personal communication with M. E. Epstein, 1/7/92 and 2/27/92.
44. Wallace J. Dyar, personal communication with M. E. Epstein, 2/27/92. *The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker* by Liam O'Brien, 1958.
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46. *Washington Star* (9/27/24): 1-2; 'Mystery' tunnels built by scientist 'merely as pastime,' *Washington Post* (9/27/24): 1, 8.
47. Mysterious Dupont Circle tunnel found blocked up during night, *Washington Star* (9/26/24): 1-2; Old tunnel here believed to have been used by Teuton war spies and bootleggers, *Washington Post* (9/26/24): 1, 8.
48. *Washington Post* (9/26/24): 8.
49. *Washington Star* (9/27/24): 1-2.
50. *Washington Post* (9/27/24): 1, 8; *Washington Star* (9/27/24): 1-2; Moth lover dug tunnels, *New York Times* (9/27/24): 9; W. A. Rogers, That mysterious tunnel in Washington, *Washington Post* (9/30/24): 6. F. L. Rockwood to Dyar, 11/6/24, HGDP, b 2, f 3.
51. *Washington Post* (9/28/24): 1-2; (9/29/24): 2; (3/4/42): 12; (5/25/58): A3; *Washington Star* (3/4/42): A6; (5/24/58): A24. W. J. Dyar, personal communication with M. E. Epstein, 2/27/92.
52. L. O. Howard to H. R. Carter, 2/8/18, NARA, RG7, E-34, b 77, f "Carter"; Dyar to T. D. A. Cockerell, 1/9/18, and Dyar to L. O. Howard, 5/4/18; NARA, RG7, E-34, b 125, f "Dy 4 of 5"; L. O. Howard to Dyar, 2/28/19, NARA, RG7, E-34, b 125, f "Dy 3 of 5"; Dyar to L. O. Howard, 4/14/19, NARA, RG7, E-34, b 124, f "Dy"; Dyar to L. O. Howard, 7/24/22, NARA, RG7, E-34, b 125, f "Dy 1 of 5"; Mrs. Harrison G. Dyar to C. L. Marlatt, 1/30/29, NARA, RG7, E-35, b 83, f "Dyar, Mrs." W. J. Dyar, personal communication with M. E. Epstein, 2/27/92.
53. Dyar to L. O. Howard, 9/10/16, 5/24/17, 5/29/17, 8/2/17, 1/10/18, NARA, RG7, E-34, b 125, f "Dy 4 of 5"; L. O. Howard to Dyar, 12/1/14, 12/14/14, 1/9/15, NARA, RG7, E-34, b 125, f "Dy 5 of 5"; A. Busck to Dyar, 1/10/16, and Dyar to A. Busck, 1/15/16, SIA, RU 140, Dept. of Entomology Records (DER), b 16, f 1; Memorandum for Mr. Harrison, 12/17/16, and memorandum for Mr. O'Leary, 12/29/16, RG16, Secretary of Agriculture, General Correspondence, E-17, PI 191, b 274, f "Charges and Criticism, 1 of 2"; T. R. Harrison to Mr. Caffey, 5/2/17, NARA, RG16, E-17, b 375, f "Charges 2 of 2"; D. F. Houston to W. Christian, 5/1/17, 5/8/17, and D. F. Houston to Dyar, 5/8/17, NARA, microfilm 400, reel #497, 406. R. K. Robbins personal communication. *Dyar v. Dyar* transcript.
54. Dyar to L. O. Howard, 8/2/17, 2/8/18, NARA, RG7, E-34, b 125, f "Dy 4 of 5."
55. Accession #61931, SIA, Registrar, 1834-1958. Dyar to A. Busck, 6/9/17, DER, b 16, f 1.
56. Dyar to L. O. Howard, 8/11/17, 8/13/17, 1/14/18, and L. O. Howard to Dyar, 8/15/17, NARA, RG7, E-34, b 125, f "Dy 4 of 5"; F. Knab to L. O. Howard, 2/9/18, and L. O. Howard to F. Knab, 2/11/18, NARA, RG7, E-34, b 227, f "Knab, F."; B. P. Clark to L. O. Howard, 7/21/17, and L. O. Howard to B. P. Clark, 8/3/17, NARA, RG7, E-34, b 81, f "Cl, 1 of 4."
57. W. Barnes to A. Busck, 11/24/20, NARA, RG7, E-66, b 7; W. Barnes to Dyar, 11/24/20, 10/13/25, NARA, RG7, E-66, b 9; W. Barnes to L. O. Howard, 11/3/20, 12/14/20, and L. O. Howard to W. Barnes, 10/11/20, 10/12/20, 11/9/20, 12/20/20, NARA, RG7, E-66, b 11; Dyar to W. Barnes, 11/12/20, NARA, RG7, E-66, b 9, and 10/3/25, NARA, RG7, E-35, b 83, f "Dyar"; Dyar to L. O. Howard, 3/11/20, 10/11/20, 10/15/20, 10/16/20, NARA, RG7, E-34, b 125, f "Dy 5 of 5," and 10/3/25, 10/6/25, NARA, RG7, E-35, b 83, f "Dyar"; L. O. Howard to A. Busck, 11/11/

20, NARA, RG7, b 67, f "Busck"; L. O. Howard to Dyar, 10/16/20, NARA, RG7, E-34, b 125, f "Dy 5 of 5," and 10/3/25, 10/7/25, NARA, RG7, E-35, b 83, f "Dyar."

58. W. Barnes to L. O. Howard, 11/3/20, NARA, RG7, E-66, b 11.

59. Dyar to L. O. Howard, 10/11/20, NARA, RG7, E-34, b 125, f "Dy 5 of 5."

60. J. M. Aldrich to C. D. Walcott, 12/14/21, and W. C. Barnes to W. Barnes, undated, and W. Barnes to A. Busck, 1/19/22, and A. F. Moore to C. D. Walcott, 12/19/21, and W. Barnes to A. F. Moore, 5/12/22, NARA, RG7, E-66, b 3, f "Ba 3 of 3"; W. Barnes to L. O. Howard, 11/11/20, 1/25/22, 3/24/22, 3/31/22, and L. O. Howard to W. Barnes, 3/7/22, 3/27/22, NARA, RG7, E-66, b 11; Dyar to W. Barnes, 3/27/22, NARA, RG7, E-66, b 9; Dyar to F. H. Benjamin, 5/24/26, NARA, RG7, E-66, b 6, f "Be 2 of 4."

61. See correspondence between H. G. Dyar and W. Schaus, HGDP, b 2, f 3; Dyar to L. O. Howard, 9/4/18, 10/18/20, 1/8/21, 1/19/21, NARA, RG7, E-34, b 125, f "Dy 3 of 5"; 12/2/20, 12/4/20, NARA, RG7, E-34, b 124, f "Dy," and 5/5/25, NARA, RG7, E-35, b 83, f "Dyar"; L. O. Howard to Dyar, 12/3/20, NARA, RG7, E-34, b 124, f "Dy"; 1/18/21, NARA, RG7, E-34, b 125, f "Dy 3 of 5"; and 5/6/25, NARA, RG7, E-35, b 83, f "Dyar."

62. Dyar to L. O. Howard, 10/4/18, NARA, RG7, E-34, b 125, f "Dy 4 of 5."

63. Dyar to L. O. Howard, 2/13/25, NARA, RG7, E-35, b 83, f "Dyar."

64. Dyar to L. O. Howard, 3/8/25, NARA, RG7, E-35, b 83, f "Dyar."

65. L. O. Howard to Dyar, 2/14/25, NARA, RG7, E-35, b 83, f "Dyar."

66. Services for Dr. H. G. Dyar, mosquito expert, tomorrow, *Washington Post* (1/23/29): 4. W. J. Dyar, personal communication with M. E. Epstein, 1/7/92. D. F. Houston to Dyar, 1/3/18, NARA, RG 16, b 375, f "Charges"; Dyar to L. O. Howard, 4/16/19, NARA, RG7, E-34, b 124, f "Dy"; Dyar to L. O. Howard, 5/17/21, NARA, RG7, E-34, b 125, f "Dy 3 of 5"; Dyar to

L. O. Howard 1/18/25, 11/26/25, 11/30/25, 5/6/26, 12/15/27, 12/17/27, and L. O. Howard to Dyar, 11/28/25, 12/2/25, 5/11/26, 12/16/27, 3/19/28, NARA, RG7, E-35, b 83, f "Dyar"; L. O. Howard to and from A. Wetmore, 12/16/26, 12/18/26, HGDP, b 2, f 1.

67. Dyar to L. O. Howard, 6/22/24, NARA, RG7, E-34, b 124, f "Dy."

68. L. O. Howard to Dyar, 3/16/23, NARA, RG7, E-34, b 125, f "Dy 1 of 5."

69. Dyar to L. O. Howard, 1/18/25, NARA, RG7, E-35, b 83, f "Dyar."

70. L. O. Howard to Dyar, 1/23/25, NARA, RG7, E-35, b 83, f "Dyar."

71. Dyar to L. O. Howard, 1/21/27, NARA, RG7, E-35, b 83, f "Dyar."

72. Dyar to L. O. Howard, 1/21/27, NARA, RG7, E-35, b 83, f "Dyar."

73. A. Busck to L. O. Howard, 2/11/19, NARA, RG7, E-34, b 67, f "Busck 1 of 3."

74. District of Columbia—general assessment 1927–28, 192. Dyar to W. W. Stockberger, 11/19/28, and Dyar to C. L. Marlatt, 11/7/28, NARA, RG7, E-35, b 83, f "Dyar."

75. *Washington Post* (1/23/29): 4. Dyar to F. M. Jones, 10/31/27, HGDP, b 2, f 1; Dyar to C. L. Marlatt, 8/31/28, and Dyar to L. O. Howard, 10/5/28, and L. O. Howard to Dyar, 11/13/28, and L. O. Howard to C. L. Marlatt, 10/5/28, and W. W. Stockberger to C. L. Marlatt, undated, NARA, RG7, E-35, b 83, f "Dyar."

76. W. P. A. Dyar to C. L. Marlatt, 3/7/29, NARA, RG7, E-35, b 83, f "Dyar, Mrs."

77. W. J. Dyar, personal communication with M. E. Epstein, 1/7/92 and 2/27/92. W. P. Dyar to C. L. Marlatt, 3/7/29, and C. L. Marlatt to W. P. Dyar, 2/28/29 and undated, and H. Morrison to W. P. Dyar, 7/22/29, 11/22/29, 12/16/29, NARA, RG7, E-35, b 83, f "Dyar, Mrs." □

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